

**Message: God is With Us**  
**By Pastor Daniel Dennison**  
**August 9, 2020**  
**Matthew 28:16-20**  
**Look Up Sermon Series**

In 2013 I had the privilege of going to Israel for about 2 weeks with a group of campus ministers. Naturally, we saw all kinds of incredible things while we toured all over Israel, but one of the most impactful and yet gut-wrenching things that we did was spend about a half day at Yad Vashem. If you're not familiar with Yad Vashem, it's the World Holocaust Remembrance Center and it's actually the 2<sup>nd</sup> most visited site in all of Israel. It's an extremely moving place and you cannot help but leave feeling absolutely wrecked. You leave processing so much of what you saw, and you cannot help but come face to face with the reality that our world is messed up to an amazing magnitude.

And I don't know about you, but I'm a little guilty of thinking that the Holocaust was an isolated incident and that sort of thing would never happen in more modern times. But 30 years after 6,000,000 Jews were killed, 20% of Cambodia's population was exterminated in a mass genocide that killed around 2,000,000 people in the mid 70s. And then in the mid 1990s about 1,000,000 Rwandans were killed in a mass genocide.

I promise there is good news in today's sermon but let me just further illustrate for you the brokenness in our world today. According to International Justice Mission there are about 40 million people trapped in modern day slavery, more than at any time in the history of the world. 1 in 4 of those are a child. And that industry is generating over \$150 billion annually. If we bring it just a little closer to home, would you believe that Every 10 seconds a report of child abuse is made in the United States? And just within Oklahoma we have 9,500 children living in foster care.

So, let me just say it one more time, this world is messed up. And it's broken. And I believe it's Crying out for redemption. And in the middle of all that there is a God. There is a glorious and amazing and beautiful God beyond our wildest dreams and imaginations. And that God has chosen to invite us close to him,

which is an incredible thing in and of itself. And he has linked arms with us in a way and given us all marching orders if you will.

And we see those marching orders woven through scripture. We see them from the very beginning in Genesis when God tasks man to partner with him in overseeing his new creation. We see those marching orders later in Genesis when God goes to Abraham and says I am blessing you so that you might go and bless the world. We see those marching orders in Isaiah 6 when God says “Whom shall I send? And the prophet responds send me Lord.” And we see those marching orders in our scripture this morning: **Go therefore and make disciples of ALL nations.** Not just go and spend time with people who you like and people who look and act and think like you but go and make disciples of ALL people regardless of their skin color, regardless of their socio-economic status, regardless of their nationality, regardless of their political party.

The world is messed up on a magnitude that is staggering, and people are lost and God cares. And God is asking this morning: Who shall we send? Who will go for us?

So, I want to just back up a few steps if we can. And I want us to just think about God for a few minutes. I want us to just think for a moment about who is asking the question and who is giving the marching orders. Have you ever been asked to do something, and you respond by saying: well who’s asking? Isn’t that such a wonderful arrogant me centered thing to say? Yes, I might help, BUT who’s asking? And so, as we think about the Great Commission, which is what these last 4 verses of Matthew’s Gospel are called (**SLIDE**), as we think about it, I think it helps to ask: Who is asking the question of whom shall I send? Who is giving the marching orders of go therefore and make disciples of all nations?

I want to share a few images with you this morning if that’s ok. I just want to put our minds around the idea of who it is that is asking the question and giving the marching orders. The first picture we’re going to put up is a Hubble Deepfield (**SLIDE**). This is a photograph of 10,000 galaxies. So those aren’t stars. If you’re thinking yea I’ve looked up and seen stars like that before, no each one of those lights is a galaxy. If the resolution was better you would see even more than you see here, but again, 10,000 galaxies each of which are the size of our Milky Way galaxy or in some cases even greater.

And as we think about this image, here's what is mind blowing. Scripture tells us that God spoke and the universe came into being. Psalm 33:6, (SLIDE) **"By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host."** It continues in v.9, **"For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm."** So, God by the simple command of his voice brought forth our entire universe. And this is the one asking the question: Whom shall we send? This is the one giving us our marching orders of going forth and making disciples of all nations. And if you're saying: Well who wants to know. He wants to know! The galaxy breathing God would like to know who will go for us.

I've got another image for us. (SLIDE) The sombrero galaxy is 31 million light years away from where we are right now. So try to process that for a minute. Light moves 186,000 miles per second. If you do that for a year you travel 5.9 trillion miles. A trillion is pointless for us to even talk about because it's so big we can't hardly even wrap our brains around it. But that's a light year, 5.8 trillion miles. And if you go 29 million light years at 5.9 trillion miles for each one of those 31 million light years... I'll pause and just let you do the math real quick on your scratch paper.

Ok, well I don't know what you got, but if you go 5.9 trillion miles per year for 31 million years you would arrive at the Sombrero galaxy. And it looks so innocuous. It looks like a frisbee or a flying tortilla coming at you. But this innocuous looking galaxy is enormous. It has 200-300 billion stars. And most of you have never even seen or heard of this thing. And you say well what's it even doing out there if I didn't know about it?

It's doing what it was made to do. It's praising God on a staggering magnitude. And you didn't even know it. We come here every week to worship God, but let me tell you, there's a whole universe that's just a tiny part of the symphony that brings God praise. Just try and remember that the next time you are upset that you didn't like the songs that got played in church.

A lot of astronomers are honestly perplexed at why the universe is so big. That's why we spend so much money trying to figure out if there is other life in this universe, because we're left to see the size of our universe and we think: there has got to be other living creatures in this place. There's gotta be more habitable

planets in this thing. It's way too big if it's just a place for you and me. You thought your 5-bedroom house was too much for your little family, but if the universe was created just to house humanity, it's oversized in a lot of ways! Astronomers legitimately struggle with that question of why it is so big. But if they knew the reason for the existence of the universe. If they knew the universe's primary function wasn't to house humanity but is to magnify the creator. Then they would know it's not too big at all, it's just about the right size. To give praise to God. That's what the heavens and the universe are doing this morning, they are praising God and giving him glory.

I want to look for a moment at Psalm 148. There are 150 Psalms, so this is only 2 Psalms from the end, and it opens in a powerful way in verse 1, it says: **Praise the Lord!** Now you would think after 147 Psalms you would have sort of gotten your head around that idea. But the Psalmist is still making the point. And there's an exclamation point there, which I think is appropriate. Because it doesn't say "oh praise the lord. Oh brother." Pastor lingo for "I have no idea what your name is!"

There's some serious horse power coming up here in this text: **(SLIDE) Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights. Praise him all his angels, praise him all his hosts.** So, the Psalmist starts up here. Which is the theme of our sermon series: LOOK UP. This is the way it works with God. He created the heavens and THEN the earth. God always seems to want to frame things first with things that are bigger than us and then down to include our humble estate.

Now look at v.3: **(SLIDE)Praise him sun and moon. Praise him all, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens! And you waters above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord. For he commanded and they were created. And he established them for ever and ever. He gave a decree and it shall not pass away.**

God doesn't need us. He doesn't need a band, he doesn't need a song. He's got an entire universe singing to him! He's got a symphony of praise going on. Just think about it: There's a lot of praise going on. Every time a rose blooms that pod pops, we can't hear it, but God can. And every day millions of them pop. Or a bird's wings that flap through the sky. Every ocean wave that crashes on a rocky shore. The winds that blow through the trees. Everything is bringing praise to

God... when a baby cries, when a human being laughs. It's all of god's creation praising him!

And I'm telling you he is big and powerful and amazing and beautiful and expansive in every way. And HE is who is asking the question! He's who is giving us our marching orders. And that is crazy if you just pause to think about it. God didn't ask anyone to help him make the universe, he didn't need Einstein or anybody else. He said I know how to make a universe. Watch this. Universe.

And then something really crazy happened. Scripture says that after God created the universe, he created man and he breathed into him the very breath of life. And he took from him a rib and fashioned that into a woman while the man was asleep. And he awakened to a whole new life. And the new life was me and her and god in harmony and partnership together. With a God who didn't need anybody or anything. He created everything that is in time and space from a place outside of time and space. Now he's in the garden with a man and a woman. And he says here's the new plan: I'm going to partner with you. You will be my caretakers of earth.

Adam could have said: Well who's asking? You want us to take care of the place, who's asking? I am. I am that I am is asking. And at that point everything began to go wrong. Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent. Cain kills Abel. Men begin to take multiple wives. The people begin to worship false gods. And a redemption story that was already set in motion before the ages begins to unfold.

And in that redemption process, God included people. Prophets proclaimed the way. A baby was born, but he needed parents to care for him. Christ was born to die alone because he was the only one alive who could carry the weight of the sin of the world. And in his resurrection, he has said the partnership that started in Genesis is still very much alive. Because I need you to be proclaimers of life and grace to all the people on the planet. I'm choosing you to finish the job. I'm choosing you to help others follow me. That's why are mission here at Asbury is what it is: Helping Others Follow Jesus!

I love the way Paul writes this in the opening lines of the book of Romans. Because he really unpacks the beauty of this partnership. **(SLIDE) Paul a servant of Christ Jesus. Called to be an apostle. Set apart for the Gospel of God, which**

**he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures. Concerning his Son who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead Jesus Christ our Lord. Through whom we have received grace. And apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations. Including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.**

He just squeezes it all together. And what Paul is saying is there has been an amazing work. And Christ has come to us. And grace has come to us. But with grace comes a calling of apostleship that is fulfilled in us making Christ's name known among all the nations. Inherent in redemption is that we are a part of the plan!

And as I think about the great commission, it sounds a lot like "hey, go do this." But it's less of a command and more of an unthinkable invitation that the God of the universe is offering us! It IS a great commission. And we do have marching orders. It's very clear what we're supposed to be about on the planet today. We are called to take the Gospel of Christ to every living breathing person on planet earth at all costs for the sake of his name. We are called to be peacemakers and bring life and grace to all of the hurt and broken places in our world.

If you were wondering why I started this sermon off by painting a picture of the brokenness in our world, it's because we are supposed to be a part of that solution. The God who spoke our entire universe into being is trying to partner with us to bring redemption to the nations.

Let me give you 3 quick applications before we close. If God is trying to partner with us, what are some basic things that we need to be doing?

**(SLIDE) First, we need to do as the sermon series says and we need to LOOK UP!**

When we look up, we're putting God ahead of our own plans. We're acknowledging his awesome, divine, graceful power and we're seeking to align our lives with his. When we look up, we're acknowledging that we need to be filled up by God if we're going to affectively fill others up. That means we're becoming an active part of an adult discipleship community, we're finding a mid-week Bible study or life care group to be a part of, we're engaging in mission and

outreach opportunities and through these things we are growing. Because as we grow, we are then able to help others grown.

**(SLIDE) Secondly, we need to pray.** If we're going to link up with God's mission, we need to pray for those who still need to hear the Gospel. That might be someone in your family, that might be someone at your office, that might be the person who cuts your hair, that might be the person who mows your yard, or the person you always see at the gym. Are you praying for the people in your life who have not yet given their lives to Jesus?

**(SLIDE) And thirdly we need to put ourselves out there and have conversations with others.** We need to get to know people and hear their stories and share our lives with them. We need to invite our neighbors over for dinner, strike up a conversation with that person who makes your coffee every morning. We need to take an interest in other people and get outside of our bubbles if we are going to link up with God and be a part of his redemptive mission.

God, who doesn't need to, is choosing to invite each of us into his glorious plan. The Great commission isn't really God putting a blue print in our lap and saying, "go do that." It's really more of God saying "This is what I'm doing. I don't know what you're doing, but this is what I'm doing. And I would love for you to come along and be a part of what I am doing." Which is God being loving and gracious so that we don't end up doing whatever we were doing and missing the thing that God is doing. God is inviting us. He's not pushing us out the door. He's saying, "this is what I'm doing and where I'm going, why don't you come be a part of it."

If you want to be close to Jesus, if you want to be in that intimate place with God and literally feel the breath of heaven on your life. Then you need to be where Jesus is. We've spent way too long trying to get Jesus where we are. And instead we need to get on board with where he is. And where he is is going to all the unreached peoples of all the earth. Where he is is going to all of the hurt and broken places in our community and breathing life and grace.

So, if you haven't felt a real intimacy with Christ, closeness and fellowship with the Holy Spirit... it may be because you're off here doing your thing and God's over here doing God's thing. And he's not responding to all of your invitations to

come join up with your thing. But he continues to invite you to link up with his plan of redemption.

Maybe you're reading all the right books, and attending all the right events, and listening to all the right podcasts, and holding all the right theology. But as far as a real dynamic living relationship with Jesus Christ that is absolutely turning you inside out on a daily basis... You're like "yea I don't know the last time I was really there." And it could be that the "there" is where the road divided and God walked on to what his plan is. Meanwhile we stayed over here, and we continued to focus on our thing. Oh, we may have invited God to come be a part of it, but we never really stopped to consider what God's plans were. Instead we got consumed with growing our business, or buying that perfect home, or attaining that graduate degree, or pushing our kids to be the best at their sport or earning as much money as we possibly can. And none of those things are inherently bad, but if we never stop to ask God what he's about and what he wants us to be about, our hearts begin to shrivel up and die.

And God is saying this morning: there are people who are waiting for me ON YOU. And instead we are just shriveling up in trivial nothing because we've chosen to do our own thing and God is committed to doing his thing.

Who's asking? A God who doesn't need us but is inviting us. Out of kindness and generosity and love. To get on board with the thing he's doing in the world. Right now. And until the end of time.